The Lowdown on High Blood Pressure

ONE SIMPLE WAY TO MEASURE THE HEALTH OF YOUR HEART IS BY CHECKING YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE. HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE, OR HYPERTENSION, IS WHEN YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE MEASURES 140/90 OR GREATER ON TWO OR MORE OCCASIONS. HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE IS YOUR HEART’S WAY OF TELLING YOU THAT IT IS WORKING HARDER THAN IT SHOULD.

WHAT IS THE SCARY TRUTH ABOUT HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE?

Blood pressure that is higher than normal leads to the following:

- Heart attack
- Stroke
- Heart failure
- Atherosclerosis (fatty buildup in the arteries)
- Kidney damage
- Vision loss
- Erectile dysfunction

The good news?

You can lower your blood pressure and decrease your risk for all of the conditions listed above. Follow these 8 heart tips for better heart health:

1. **Take your condition seriously.** High blood pressure is often called “the silent killer” because most people don’t feel like anything is wrong. If your blood pressure is high, see your health care provider to discuss how you can get it back down to normal.

2. **Take medications as prescribed** and if you stop taking a medication for any reason (cost, side effects, or other) tell your provider immediately.

3. **Know your risk factors.** Some risk factors for high blood pressure (like family history, age, and gender) cannot be changed. Here is a list of risk factors that you CAN change:
   - Overweight or obesity
   - Not enough physical activity (less than 150 minutes of activity per week)
   - Cigarette smoking
   - Too much salt in the diet
   - Drinking too much alcohol (more than 2 drinks/day for men, more than 1 drink/day for women)
   - Stress
   - Sleep apnea

4. **Embrace lifestyle change.** This means something different for everyone. It may mean losing weight, getting more physically active, quitting smoking and/or decreasing stress. No matter which change you need to make, now is the time to set your goals and commit to better health! (Refer to corresponding fit facts and goal setting)

5. **Live the DASH way.** The DASH diet (Dietary Approach to Stopping Hypertension) is a very effective way to help lower your blood pressure through healthier eating.

6. **Get active.** Start with a little bit of activity and work up to 150 minutes of moderate physical activity (such as brisk walking) per week. Get the okay from your health care provider before starting an exercise plan.

7. **Monitor your blood pressure often** with return visits to your health care provider and by using a home blood pressure monitor. Ask your health care provider for recommendations for selecting a home monitor.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

American Council on Exercise
American Heart Association